

THE
IDEAL IN JUDAISM

AND OTHER SERMONS BY

THE REV. MORRIS JOSEPH

PREACHED DURING

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TO MY WIFE
AND TO THE
CONGREGATION WHO HAVE
WORSHIPPED AT THE HAMPSTEAD
SABBATH AFTERNOON
SERVICES.

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J. H. Meyer

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PREFACE

THE present volume is published at the request of several of my friends, who have signified their desire to possess, in a permanent form, a selection from the discourses which I delivered at the Hampstead Sabbath Afternoon Services. The diffidence with which I comply with that request would be even greater than it is, but for the thought that Anglo-Jewish homiletical literature is of the scantiest proportions, and that any addition to it has at least a *primâ facie* claim to justification. Whether the following pages are a desirable addition, it is for the public to decide.

The title of the book, though borrowed, in conformity with familiar usage, from the initial discourse, has not been selected at haphazard. It indicates the one uniform purpose with which these sermons were written, and which, despite the diversity of

their subject-matter, establishes a fundamental likeness between them all. They were preached with the paramount object of elucidating, however inadequately, the Ideal in Judaism, of expounding those spiritual teachings of the religion which render it an effective inspiration in our day, seeing that while they at least equal in grandeur, they surpass in simplicity, those embodied in any of the other great theistic systems. Such an exposition, I venture to think, is the urgent need of an age which is fraught with peril, not merely for Judaism, but for Religion.

In determining the contents of the book—a task in which I have received most valuable assistance from my friends, Mr. Israel Abrahams and Mr. Oswald John Simon—my chief aim has been to select those discourses which promised to be useful to the largest number of my readers. At the same time, I have kept in mind the desirability of making such a selection as should be fairly representative of the entire range of doctrine taught at the Hampstead Services. Contrary to what appears to be the general impression, that doctrine was rarely polemical. The words

spoken from my pulpit were far more frequently words of hope and encouragement, such as are especially needed in these times by the many who feel their Judaism melting away under the solvent of modern criticism, and by the many more who are losing their hold on faith and duty in presence of life's grim problems. Thus, there will be found in the following pages little about those minor religious questions which divide and subdivide our community, much about the larger and infinitely more momentous difficulties which vex the conscience and disquiet the soul. Fully aware, though I am, of the many imperfections of these sermons, I would fain hope that they may prove helpful to some of the larger congregation to whom they are now addressed, and that here and there they may succeed in gaining a wavering heart for the ancestral faith and for the higher life.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE IDEAL IN JUDAISM	I
WHY AM I A JEW?	12
THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL	21
JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY	31
THE SACRIFICIAL RITE	40
THE MOSAIC DIETARY LAWS	50
ISRAEL'S WATCH-NIGHT	62
THE PENITENTIAL SEASON	72
THE CRUSE THAT FAILED NOT	83
'THE NEW YEAR FOR THE TREES'	92
THE TRUE LIFE	101
THE CHILDLIKE HEART	111
PESSIMISM	121
THE SUFFERING MESSIAH	132
THE RAINBOW	142
'BE THOU A BLESSING'	152

	PAGE
WOMAN'S INFLUENCE	163
ART AND MORALS	175
'SPEAK, LORD, FOR THY SERVANT HEARETH'	
(<i>Children's Sermon</i>)	184
'IT IS SOON GONE, AND WE FLY AWAY' .	193
NOTES	205

THE IDEAL IN JUDAISM

'Behold, the rod of Aaron of the house of Levi had budded ; it put forth buds, and bare blossoms, and yielded almonds.'—NUMBERS xvii. 23.

A DAY or two before the recent festival of Pentecost, I had occasion to pass through the so-called Jewish quarter at the East End. The district, usually dingy and unattractive in the extreme, was for the nonce transfigured. Quantities of flowers, which were being sold in the streets, had turned it into a fair garden. The purchasers were of the poorest. They were buying the flowers to deck their homes for the coming Festival. Their dwellings might be humble, but to welcome the Feast of the Lord they were to become palaces. The holy season should have a right royal reception even in a White-chapel garret.

This juxtaposition of squalor and comeliness, this striking instance of the desert being made to blossom as the rose, brought home to me the truth that, whatever might be said to the contrary, Judaism is a religion of ideals. The men and women of low degree who were

buying these flowers may not have invested the incident in which they were taking part with all the symbolic meaning I discerned in it, but some of it they must have felt. On the face of it, the act was a poetic act—one that told of refinement, of reverence for something higher than the sordid. A coarse and unimaginative person would have kept his money in his pocket, or spent it in drink.

Now, this feeling for the ideal, which is to be found in East End hovels as well as in Mayfair mansions, is the work of Judaism.

Had it not been for his religion, the Jew, thanks to a hostile world, would have had nothing to strive after beyond the means of satisfying his lower cravings, nothing to live for save mere life itself—life in its grosser aspects. In spite of crushing disaster and demoralising oppression, he has never lost his hold either on hope or on virtue. He has been imprisoned in a ghetto, but his spirit has soared beyond it into an ampler air—into the realms of the ideal, of which no mortal hand, however tyrannical, may presume to hold the key. Shut out from the world, he has made a fair world for himself, peopled with the brightest forms—with faith, resignation, duty, in whose company he has lived, and nobly lived. Throughout the long night of persecution the star that promised the dawn has

never vanished from the heavens, and the bitter waters of the world's contumely have been for ever sweetened by the magic influence of religion. It is not only that a fixed belief in a Messianic Redeemer saved the Israelite of the Middle Ages from despair and from the vices of the desperate; he was kept from degradation by an all-penetrating religion which sanctified the commonest details of his daily life. Every man's hand was against him; but what could man do to him, seeing that God was with him always, when he was sitting in the house, when he was walking by the way, when he was lying down, and when he was rising up? Yes, and above all when he was sitting in the house. A pariah, an outcast, condemned at times to be literally a fugitive and a vagabond, he found, by a fine anomaly, the imperishable roots of his nobility in his home. Here was a commonplace domain which might have yielded only thorns and thistles, but which, under the touch of a mystic hand, became a Garden of Eden. The miracle of old was repeated; the rod placed before the Lord became fair with bud and blossom and fruit; the home-life was lived in the Divine Presence, and though outwardly it was lowly and unpromising, yet that Presence made it glorious. The home was idealised; it became a sanctuary; its

table was an altar, the meal a solemn sacrifice, the father a ministering priest. The Divine name written on the doorpost was but a symbol of the holiness with which the house was invested. Not prayer only, but every act, however familiar, performed within its hallowed precincts, was worship. Is it a marvel that the mediæval Israelite kept his integrity when all his surroundings were base, seeing that once more, as in the far-off days, religion stood on his behalf between the dead and the living—between a world spiritually dead and the souls that were quickened with the fear of the Lord—and that for him the plague of corruption was stayed? Morally, the Jew would have perished long since, had it not been for his power to aspire, to live out of himself, to seek to inaugurate the days of heaven upon earth.

And the same saving influence is still at work. The over-driven tailor of the East End, whose woes stir a Parliament with compassion, cherishes ideals which yield him a solace and a strength his sympathisers dream not of. The pathos of his life springs not from its wretchedness alone, but from the simple joys and the moral sweetness which he opposes to his misery, and which it is unable to kill. The sanctity of the home is still a Jewish ideal in Whitechapel. The flowers

with which Pentecost is welcomed in the dwellings of the poor are but emblems. What they symbolise is the peace and the purity which, triumphing over hostile surroundings, still characterise the home-life of our humbler classes. Those features stand out in bold relief in the domestic celebration of a festival by the Jewish poor. If they followed the example before their eyes, it would become the occasion for the riotous self-indulgence which too often goes to make an English holiday. Instead, there is self-control, dignity, the feeling that the day and the house are alike holy to the Lord.

Reverence for the home, the most fruitful of Jewish ideals, is the secret of half the virtues of our toiling class. It clothes the poor garret with unspeakable charm in the eyes of its indwellers, so that for them there is literally no place like home, and the public-house cannot compete with it for their favour. It imparts a sanctity to family life, turning the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents, binding the members of the household to each other in an enduring bond of loyalty and love.

While the old conception of family life survives, the Jew will not want for a potent source of the noblest inspiration. But I

cannot hide from myself the fact that, under the stress of new conditions and evil example, that conception is in danger of becoming blurred and indistinct. Even among the poor the home is not quite the ennobling force it was. The rod still blossoms as of yore, but the canker is beginning to show itself in the flower with alarming frequency. Among those of higher social station the danger has attained at least equally serious proportions. Let us beware lest we lose this cherished ideal, lest the sanctity of domestic life—the fabric that has weathered the storms of centuries—crumble away under the too fierce heat of prosperity, and carry with it all our precious things—purity, peace, religion. We are fain to consecrate the house with prayer when we first take up our abode in it; but better still is the consecration that is wrought by the lives of its indwellers—by that reverence for the home which inspires them with mutual forbearance and love, which arms them with the self-control needful for battling with the world's temptations, for resisting the onslaught of their own ignoble passions. If our whole moral life is not to be in danger of shipwreck, let us renew, ere it is too late, our covenant with this ideal of our fathers.

This sanctification of the home is, of course, only one instance of the transfiguration of the

common elements of life which is so eminently characteristic of our religion. Judaism claims for the ideal the whole domain of the actual; it has annexed the world, and established there the kingdom of heaven. But there has been no sacrifice of sublimity in consequence. A recent writer¹ seems to imply that the ideals of Sinai are narrower than those embodied in the Sermon on the Mount. But his very proofs are his all-sufficient refutation. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and might.' 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' 'Love thine enemy.' These are the maxims of the Gospels, it is true; but they are also the doctrine of Judaism, and it was Judaism that taught that doctrine first. No; we have nothing to be ashamed of in our moral and spiritual teachings, unless it be our failure to come within measurable distance of completely fulfilling them. I say, measurable distance, for that ideal only is worthy of the name which is impossible of attainment. There can be no finality in moral effort. The goal must be an ever-receding one; for the race, the endeavour, and not the goal, is the prize. Every peak we scale must disclose yet higher pinnacles to which we have to climb. 'The better we may reach, but not the best; but no one ever

¹ Count Tolstoï in the *Universal Review* for June 1890.

found the better who did not aim at the best.'¹ And surely the best is to be found in those precepts of the ancient Law which summon us to a perfection that can never be ours, but to which we can ever draw nearer and nearer. The whole-hearted love of God, the fulfilment of the yearning to be at one with Him in spirit by means of a perfect obedience—this can never be our lot, in this life at least. But the Pentateuch bids us aspire after it, and every Psalm echoes the command. 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'—a simple and a familiar maxim indeed, but an utterly impossible one. Upon it for a foundation the whole Bible is built. But its impossibility is its glory. To strive to obey it is at once to fail and to succeed—to fail in realising the whole ideal, to succeed in exalting ourselves by our very effort. It is a glorious will-o'-the-wisp that allures us. But it leads us, not into a morass, but to a paradise, not to death, but to life—the true life of self-control and self-surrender.

The measure of the vitality of a religion is the impossibility, that is, the nobility, of its ideals. And if this be true, Judaism has a long life before it. At first sight, it must be owned, it compares unfavourably, as a source of inspiration, with Christianity, owing to the

¹ Moncure Conway, *Idols and Ideals*, p. 183.

lack of that central figure whose sufferings and charm of character move our neighbours to alternate sympathy and emulation. But the Jew has, in truth, a similar ideal. If it inspires him not, it is because he does not seek for it. For what can thrill us more powerfully than the spectacle of Israel's devotion and martyrdom? What eloquence can rival that of the appeal which every line of our history, written as it is with the life-blood of our heroes, makes to us to be true to the faith, loyal to duty, staunch champions of religion and righteousness whatever the cost? Those Jews who sigh for an example which rightly inspires their fellows of another creed, need but to ponder their own story in order to still their longing. Therefore, I say, let our children more diligently learn the history of their race; it is the one trustworthy means of keeping them Jews in these days, of showing them that their religion is still worth living for, that it is a sacred legacy of the past, deserving of all their devotion, all their chivalry.

And here, finally, we catch a glimpse of the secret source whence Judaism draws its wondrous strength. 'That religion,' to quote the same writer once more, 'seals its own doom which binds itself to a defunct ideal.'¹ The saying is true. But Judaism has not so bound

¹ *Idols and Ideals*, p. 181.

itself. All its ideals are living—some for one soul, some for another. It is a well-spring of inspiration for the most diverse minds—from the weary worker in the squalid East End court, with his cheering dream of a Messiah who will one day rout all the sorrows of the poor with one swift and merciful blow, to his richer brother in the fashionable West, whose Judaism calls upon him to bring nearer the Golden Age by foreshadowing its moral beauty in the nobility of his own life. One downcast spirit, overweighted with the burden and the mystery of the world, it soothes and strengthens with pictures of a heaven, where the righteous sit crowned with glory and basking in the sunshine of the Divine Presence, where all the problems of this life are to be solved, and all its sorrows compensated with a bliss that no tongue can describe, no mind conceive, where the lost ones who have gone before shall fold those who have joined them at last in one long, never-ending embrace. Another spirit of a different mould it gladdens and stimulates with other visions—with tidings of the glory, not of the heavenly, but of the earthly life, with the thought of the inherent grandeur of righteousness, the inimitable sublimity of self-sacrifice, with the promise of that ineffably sweet satisfaction that springs from the strenuous endeavour to do the right in the teeth of

difficulty and temptation. And so, because, like the murmur of the great ocean, it tells a tale that changes with the mood of the listener, Judaism can never die. The High Priest's rod bears at one and the same time bud and blossom and fruit—truth in the germ, truth ever developing, and truth that is ripe; and the human soul, in every stage of its development, can find in it the one message it needs for solace and inspiration.

WHY AM I A JEW ?

‘Verily, all the nations walk every one in the name of his god ; but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.’—MICAH iv. 5.

A QUESTION which I raised incidentally in the course of a recent sermon¹ may not unprofitably be made the theme of our reflections to-day : Why am I a Jew ? For every Israelite who puts this question to himself, there are perhaps a thousand others who have never even asked it ; and of the few who do ask it, many, I fear, are content to dismiss it unanswered. And yet every one who shrinks from degrading religion to the level of mere superstition must see that he asks, and that he is answered. For if our Judaism is an unreasoned sentiment—a piece of mechanism moving automatically without conviction for its motive power—if it is a mere birthmark, it is not true religion. Belief must be justified to the intellect if it is to be clear of the charge of credulity, and the mere accident of having been born a Jew is no sufficient explanation of our Judaism. Even faith is too dearly bought if its price is the surrender of our thinking

¹ The Sermon on ‘The Election of Israel.’

powers. God gave us 'godlike reason,' as the great dramatist terms it; and to Him and to our higher selves we have to answer for every neglect of the gift. Nor have we to fear that the most critical investigation will destroy Religion. For the religion that cannot endure the searching heat of the mind's crucible is tinsel; it does not bear the stamp of truth, which, as the Rabbins have well said, is God's own seal. Faith, in such a case, is the mark of ignorance or, paradox though it seems, a practical confession of scepticism—the mental state which prompts the fallacious cry, 'I believe because it is impossible'—as though the impossible could ever command belief. Reason cannot injure true Religion, for true Religion is reason.

Nay, however powerfully blind faith may rule conduct, its sway cannot be compared for stability, or even for strength, with the faith that springs from conviction. The roots of reasoned Religion are in the calm and steadfast mind, not in the fickle, changeful emotions, and the storm of doubt only drives them deeper. Those who thus build up their creed slowly and painfully, with many searchings of heart, are like him of whom the poet sings:—

' . . . In whom persuasion and belief
Had ripened into faith, and faith become
A passionate intuition.'

They love their religion with all their heart and soul and might; for that love has fused together all the capacities of their being in one glorious amalgam, and, loving it thus, they draw from it an inspiration which hallows all their lives, and which never wanes while life endures.

It becomes, therefore, a matter of supreme necessity, a truly religious duty, to apply the test of reason to Judaism, or—to use the phrase with which we set out—to ask ourselves why we are Jews. And is it possible to give a satisfactory reply to the question? If, shaking off the mental indolence which evades the most necessary and the most momentous self-questionings, we seek for the foundations of Judaism, shall we find them to be rock or sand? Is the ancient religion of our race reared on the basis of reason, which alone can ensure its permanence in an age when critical analysis insists upon rending the veil which hides the most sacred things? This is the question we have to ask ourselves, and only if we can answer it in the affirmative will Judaism be vindicated, and our loyalty to it justified. And of a surety we can answer it thus. For which of our essential teachings is there that is not in unison with modern knowledge and thought? God—one, impalpable, all-powerful—the central idea of Judaism, where is the

man of science with his brand-new microscope who can refute it?

For years, Agnosticism—a polite term invented to take the place of the older and the blunter word Atheism—was his creed, which he asserted with a dogmatism not to be surpassed by the most fanatical religionist. But to him, in his turn, time has brought the philosophic mind, and he has confessed his error. In vain did he attempt as with an air-pump to exhaust the theory of the universe of the idea of God; he could not detach nature from the Divine Mind that works unceasingly everywhere, and from which all things have sprung. Physical science, with balance and plummet, with its obstinate endeavours to track matter and life to their birthplace, has discovered something it could not weigh or gauge, has been led in its quest face to face with a Power before which it has fallen back silent and confounded—

‘ . . . Something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.’

And this Spirit is the God whom Judaism postulates. Nor is His oneness less unequi-

vocally affirmed by science than His existence. 'One God, one law, one element' is as emphatically the doctrine of nineteenth century thought as it was of Moses and the Prophets. The unity of Nature, the one consistent and harmonious purpose that underlies its phenomena, is but the mirror of the Mind that created and controls it. Truly, the Israelite of old who was martyred for the faith, and who in his death-agony remembered to fling his battle-cry, 'The Lord is One,' in the teeth of an idolatrous world, has been amply avenged in these latter days, and by no hand more conspicuously than that of science itself.

And of this one God, Judaism declares that He has not only made the Universe, but that He is in it, that He has not merely fashioned the hearts of men, but that He understands all their acts, that He is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed. Is this true? Is there a Divine government of the world, and are Justice and Equity the foundations of its throne? Who can doubt it that reads the face of Nature, that ponders the stirring page of history—nay, that looks into his own heart, his own life? At times, it is true, the clew to the Divine rectitude is lost, and we stand in fear and despair before some terrible outbreak of Nature's pent-up forces,

dealing wholesale and seemingly purposeless death, or before some spectacle of individual suffering coming as the sole reward of a virtuous life. But our doubt should be but momentary. The tempest-broken ship, the flooded town, the pit which fire or poisoned air has made into a tomb, hide the Divine righteousness from our eyes; but it shines forth again, like the bow that glorifies the dark cloud, in the song of the bird, in the glint of the sun on the sea, in the love of our dear ones, in the thought of the bounty and the loveliness which sustains all living things and ministers to their happiness. Contrary to the Psalmist's experience we see the righteous apparently forsaken, and it is the sinner whom God seems to keep as the apple of His eye; but the world's great annals, which reveal the whole plan and not mere fragments of it—nay, even our own experiences, if we will but listen to them—bid us hold fast to our faith in the ultimate triumph of right, in the never-halting justice, the sleepless love of the Supreme. Divine revelation ever renewing itself, human responsibility that never ends, the truth that God has given men His law—a law written with a pen of iron in the conscience of humanity, and vindicated, slowly but surely, in the lives of nations and individuals—a law which no one shall dare to

break with impunity, and in whose fulfilment happiness is alone to be found—this is the outcome of our knowledge to-day; and this is Judaism.

Is there ought more? Yes, there is the idea that we Israelites are God's witnesses—a microcosm reflecting the stupendous truths which flash forth from Nature and human life. This conception has its foundation in sober fact;¹ and every attempt of ours to keep it alive—every religious institution that maintains the Israelite's sympathetic connection with the storied Past, that feeds his historic consciousness—is completely justified.

And this is the essence of Jewish theology. Not one detail of it makes demands which reason would not indorse. I grant that the stream of Judaism in its passage through the ages has gathered up many elements which at best have been but temporarily useful. But these it is leaving behind at last; and we should not have met here to-day were we not persuaded that we can fit new raiment to our altered religious stature, and still remain Jews. Renan has characterised Judaism by calling it a 'minimum of religion.' And so it is, seeing how few and how simple are the articles of belief which form its necessary constituents. God, Duty, Israel's mission—

¹ See the Sermon on 'The Election of Israel.'

these are its chief ideas. Where is the Jew whose intelligence they stir into rebellion? There is no mystery here; no truth that needs a philosophy to expound it; no creed for which room has to be made in the mind by expelling reason from it; no lesson that a child could not grasp; no ideal that shall not suffice to lift human life to the highest pinnacle of nobility.

And thus I am led to supplement this summary of Jewish belief with a concluding word upon that other great constituent of Judaism—its moral teaching. If our theology is at once simple and sublime, so also is our ethic. It is impossible to soar to more exalted heights of spiritual truth than that to which the Jew may climb every day when he repeats the *Shemang*. And so, too, a nobler conception of duty has never been given to the world than that embodied in the old Levitical precept: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' And this maxim, which Hillel aptly quoted as the quintessence of Israel's moral law, is only the keynote. The double code of Scripture and Talmud is full of lessons equally sublime, because equally just. For, after all, morality is justice and nothing else. Kindness and mercy and love cease to be admirable—nay, cease to be moral when their bright forms cast an inevitable shadow of cruelty.

Forgiveness is only noble as long as it does not encourage wrong-doing, as long as the sinner is not spared to the injury of himself and of society. Mere abstract beauty does not make an ideal ethically sound. Judaism has recognised this truth from the first; it preaches a sane, a wholesome morality, not a spurious, a hysterical one. It has made right the basis of its ethics; and the Ten Commandments, stern but immutable, ancient but living, stand forth to-day an eloquent testimony to the justness of the principle.

Then, my brethren, let us take this Judaism of ours, tried by the test of reason and triumphantly vindicated, more closely than ever to our hearts. For among the old creeds there is none at once so simple and so glorious, with standards of duty so just and so true; among the new, none with an inspiration so fruitful as the memory of our past and the thought that we are God's elect. Let us, then, be Jews as of old—not mere mechanical items in the sum-total of the race, but earnest, active believers, cherishing the truths, and zealously discharging the duties confided to Israel in the days of old. Fervently let us exclaim with the Prophet, 'Verily, all the nations walk every one in the name of his god; but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.'

THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

‘I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations ; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.’—ISAIAH xlii. 6, 7.

THE Election of Israel is one of the central and one of the noblest ideas in Judaism. It is a two-fold idea. Israel is the chosen of God—chosen as the depository of Divine truth ; but he is chosen also to preach that truth to the world. For him God’s law has not a message merely, but a mission. It is not only to ennoble him, but through his instrumentality to teach and uplift mankind. This beautiful conception is set forth in all its fulness in the noble prayer of *Alelu*, of which the two paragraphs respectively express the two halves of the twin-idea. It is a conception, too, which runs like a golden thread throughout the Bible, though with varying sheen. That Israel is God’s people, His first-born, His peculiar treasure, is a doctrine taught on almost every page. But the universal aspect of the truth—the idea that the spiritual blessings conferred on Israel

are held by him only in trust for humanity at large, to whom he is, in turn, to extend them—this is less frequently set forth in explicit terms. It finds its clearest expression in the glowing words of the prophets, and especially in the concluding chapters of Isaiah. The text is one example among many: ‘I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.’

And yet, even when this broader doctrine is not plainly taught, it is often present like an undertone, to be caught by the sensitive ear. Already in the far-off days of Sinai, when Israel had hardly begun to roll away the reproach of Egypt, to purge himself of the taint of slavery, when his religion still was young, he received his charter from the Divine hands: ‘Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’¹ Surely, the ideal the words shadowed forth was something higher than a mere self-contained sanctity. A kingdom of priests pre-supposes a congregation to minister to—a world-wide congregation whom they are to imbue with the truths they

themselves have learnt from God's own lips, whom they are to uplift by the force of their own splendid example. They are to be a holy nation; but their sanctity is to leap from them like a flame from a central fire, until it has kindled the whole world.

I have said that the idea is a beautiful one. And, in saying so, I have not forgotten that there are many to whom it is a stumbling-block. To call ourselves the chosen people—to assert that God has revealed Himself especially to us—savours, it is said, of arrogance. God is the All-Father, we are reminded, and He extends His love and His favours to all His children alike. But where is the arrogance? Does it lie in the thought that there has been vouchsafed to us a larger share of the Divine truth than has been given to other men? Surely not. For if we did not believe this, we should deny the superiority of our own creed, and our allegiance to Judaism would be unmeaning. Why am I a Jew, if it be not because I think that Israel's religion is the purest expression of theological truth and the embodiment of the noblest ideals of duty that have ever been given to the world? Every religionist would make the same claim on behalf of his own system. In this sense he regards himself and his fellow-believers as God's elect. If we are guilty of arrogance on

such grounds, we share the guilt with every conscientious religious thinker under the sun.

Or are we arrogant because we speak of ourselves as a favoured race? With what have we been favoured? with wealth, prosperity, dominion? Let every line of our history answer. 'Israel is my son, my first-born'¹—this is the prelude to the Divine summons which calls on Pharaoh to set the Hebrews free. And what is the sequel of that summons? What is the result of that freedom? Spiritual servitude and worldly disadvantage. The gates of Egypt open the road to Sinai, but to the terrible wilderness as well; and the wilderness is the avenue to a troubled life lasting through the centuries. Israel has gained Religion by being the chosen of God, but in gaining it he has lost the world. 'Despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief'²—truly the legend of his whole life-story. Perpetual unrest, woe almost without surcease, gloom brightened by merely passing gleams—this has been his lot from the day he became God's own unto this day. The very religion which was a sign of the Divine favour, in vouchsafing to him the joy of 'a free spirit'—the spirit that can soar unhindered to God's own throne—has laid upon his life the heaviest

¹ Exod. iv. 22.

² Isaiah liii. 3.

yoke. Who so restricted in his personal liberty as the Jew? Who so bound in by the bonds of duty? 'The yoke of the kingdom of Heaven' has been for him no unmeaning phrase. Verily, there is a germ of truth in the old Talmudic legend¹ which tells how the Law was refused by the various nations in turn because of the stringency of its enactments, because of its excessive demands on their self-denial. Surely, had he consulted his selfish interests, Israel, too, might well have asked to be delivered from the burden of Judaism, to be spared the title and the responsibilities of God's elect. To this very day the Rabbi seeks to dissuade the would-be proselyte by enumerating the exacting claims which the religion he would embrace makes upon the devotion of its adherents.

In the material sense, then, we have gained nothing by being the favourites of Heaven save what other men would reject—the pain of self-conquest and the suffering inflicted by a hostile world. Is it, then, in any spirit of arrogance that Israel takes the name assigned to him by Holy Writ, that he wears the crown—a veritable crown of martyrdom, glorious though it be—which the Divine hand has set on his brow? May he not feel a just pride in the thought that a life-long agony has been his

consecration, that he has proved his right to the title and the mission of the people of God by his steadfastness under suffering? In the legendary lore of the Talmudists¹ there is a mysterious figure, the Messiah, son of Joseph, whose death is to herald the advent of the true Messiah, the son of David. He is the 'man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;' and it is only when his anguish is ended that the glad dawn of the Golden Age is to appear. Consciously or unconsciously the Rabbins have drawn for us here the image of Israel himself, whose teaching, given to men out of his very soul's travail, whose example, made doubly eloquent by suffering and stern self-conquest, shall help humanity along the upward road of progress, and prepare it for the coming of the great Day of the Lord. It is for this that we have been chosen, for this that we have been called. Is there any arrogance in such a belief, seeing that suffering is the price we have paid for cherishing it?

And what of the Present? Is our mandate exhausted? Assuming that Israel has, in the scheme of Providence, been assigned a mission in the past, is that mission still in our keeping, or has it been transferred to other hands? Was Judaism only to begin the great task, and to hand it over to other religions for completion?

¹ Succah 52a, etc.

Are those glorious dreams which illumine the prophetic page, which foreshadow the time when 'ten men out of all the languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'¹—are those dreams unmeaning, or if they have a meaning was it one only for the men of a bygone age? The answer is written in the volume of History—that other book of God which contains the revelation of the Divine Mind. In the great story of mankind no event is in vain. No nation struts its brief hour on the stage without fulfilling a distinct purpose in the stupendous drama. Egypt, Greece, Rome, did not retire from the scene before they had played their allotted part to the end; and they disappeared only because their work was done. And Israel, their contemporary, what of him? If Rome gave laws to the world, and Greece taught it to appreciate the beautiful, Israel offered it the knowledge of the true God and the noblest ethical ideals. But, unlike those great Powers, he still lives; and what is the secret of his survival, if it be not that the mission assigned to him is even yet not wholly accomplished? How many weary leagues has not humanity still to traverse before the final goal is reached, before 'the one far-off Divine

¹ Zech. viii. 23.

event' comes to pass, 'to which the whole creation moves'! What a load of sin and woe has to be lifted from its stooping shoulders, what mists of spiritual ignorance have to be dispelled by the radiance of Divine Knowledge, before the happy state to which all good men are looking forward shall have been reached at last! Is it not to help towards this consummation that 'Israel has been saved of the Lord with an everlasting salvation'? Shall he, whose creed more clearly than any other preaches the good tidings to mankind, he whose most sublime prophecies have had for their theme a Golden Age, in which, not he alone, but all humanity shall find peace and joy—he, the herald of the world's progress, moral and spiritual—shall he not see the day when the book is unsealed, when the vision is fulfilled, when God's abundant blessing shall sweep, like a fruitful flood, over all the earth? Has Israel been led thus far over the wastes of time only to die in the wilderness? Or is God's hand waxed short—that hand that never yet has faltered in its work, never yet failed in its power? A thousand times no. Faith, my brethren, faith in the vitality of our creed and our mission—this is what we especially need in these days.

For you will say, perhaps, that already the feet of humanity are firmly set on God's

highway, and no longer require any support from us—that the Jew has done his work by sowing the Divine seed in the bosom of mankind, and that the fruit will come of its own accord in God's good time. Do not think so. Religion is being purged, it is true, of superstition and error, and slowly and painfully the world is climbing to its moral regeneration. But the spiritual darkness that covers the earth is still thick enough to need the holy light that Judaism sheds, and our example may yet be helpful to many a brother in his toilsome ascent to perfection. Nor dare we rely on individual effort for the accomplishment of our sacred task. The very fact that we are preaching the truth, and living the noble life, as a race, as a people, the springs of whose nationality are seated in religion alone,—the fact that we are no mere collection of isolated believers, but still, as of old, a *kingdom* of priests and a holy *nation*,—this must intensify the eloquence of our testimony for God, and increase the force of our example a thousand-fold. Not, then, as stray units in the totality of humanity's workers, but as the army of the Lord, fighting in serried ranks for truth and righteousness, let us continue to live and strive. For only thus shall our mission be carried to its end; only thus shall the task for which Israel has been made God's elect, and preserved

30 THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

through the ages, be finally accomplished. Let us, then, glory in our title and our work. In all sincerity let us praise God for having 'chosen us from all nations, and for having given us His Law.'¹ But let us prove ourselves worthy of the distinction by showing that obedience, that fidelity to our creed, that self-sacrifice for Duty's sake, which alone can ensure the fulfilment of our world-wide task. May God give us wisdom to discern this our work, and endow us with the strength to do it! Amen.

¹ See the Synagogue liturgy.

JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

A SHORT time ago I happened to enter a church where they were baptizing an infant. The ceremony set me thinking about Christian doctrine and the points in which it differs from Judaism. Baptism has for its foundation the theory of Original Sin. Every human being, according to that theory, is tainted with the transgression of Adam and Eve, and from the consequences of that transgression the self-sacrifice of the Cross alone has power to save him. But to be thus saved, he must believe in the divinity of the Teacher who so sacrificed himself. In other words, he must be a conforming Christian; he must be received into the bosom of the Church. Baptism is the visible symbol of that reception, and therefore it becomes the necessary instrument for the remission of sin. If it be objected that a new-born child 'with no language but a cry,' no instinct save that which draws him to his mother's breast, cannot believe, any more than he can disbelieve, the reply is that he can do it by proxy; his godfather and godmother make a solemn profession of faith for him. The spirit of the rite is brought out

in sharp relief in a note appended to the Baptismal Service in the Book of Common Prayer: 'It is certain by God's word that children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved.' From which it necessarily follows that children who have not committed actual sin, but who die without having been baptized, are not undoubtedly saved. 'The old Adam' may prove their undoing in the next world, though personally they are perfectly innocent; while those children who happen to have sponsors to make a declaration of belief on their behalf before they die will be 'inheritors of the everlasting kingdom.'

This is a fair specimen—it is almost an epitome—of the teaching of the Church, and I commend it to the serious consideration of those youthful members of our own communion who may be tempted to extol Christianity at the expense of Judaism. I know from cases that have come within my own personal experience that, now and then, Jews—or to be more accurate, Jewesses—of an impressionable age are caught by the glitter of the Church, and think, with a sigh, how beautiful it would be if the rites of the Synagogue were not characterised by so severe a simplicity. They are attracted by the Christian Service with its impressive ritual, its stirring and tuneful

hymns, or they are captivated by the winning character of the hero of the Gospels; and they reflect with regret that their own form of worship is æsthetically less satisfying, and the history of their religion less instinct with personal charm. Occasionally, regret manifests itself in action of a pronounced kind, and the homely religion is abjured for the more romantic one. How often disillusion follows on such cases it is impossible to say; for converts—unless they are of the professional class that apostatise for pay and therefore apostatise often—hide any dissatisfaction with their new creed jealously from the world, nay, hardly breathe the secret even to themselves. Be that as it may, it is well that young people of our race, who exclaim ‘how superior!’ when they think of the religion of their Christian schoolmates and companions, should be at the pains to examine it in its entirety before pronouncing judgment. A religion whose surface looks so beautiful may prove to be far less satisfactory when examination is extended to the core. Music and incense, even religious stories, however inspiring, do not make a religion. It is made by cardinal truths—truths to live by, and which, if one is to live by them, must be felt to be truths. If there are people, as doubtless there are, who can honestly believe in the dogma of Original Sin, of the

34 JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Atonement, of Justification by Faith and similar essentials of Christian teaching, and lead better lives for the belief, I say, Let no man disturb their minds. Their faith is justified by their righteousness. But it is another matter altogether when we are attempting to reconstruct the religious edifice for ourselves. Then we must be careful, as befits the solemnity, the momentousness of the task we have in hand, that all our materials are sound, that the superstructure shall be not only beautiful, but stable; above all, that the foundation shall be strong. It is easy enough to join in a melodious hymn, or to admire the nobility of the central figure in a religious story. But Christianity is far from being so simple an affair. It requires its adherents to accept every word of the Gospel narrative as absolutely true, as Divinely inspired—nay, to subscribe to doctrines saturated with mysticism—doctrines which are in almost perpetual conflict with reason, and which strain belief to breaking-point. Surely, all of us who wish to preserve a character for sobriety of thought, must hesitate long before complying with so exacting a demand.

Why do I say all this? Only, of course, to bring out more clearly the reasons we have for being eminently satisfied with our own religion, eminently indisposed to recognise

any other as its superior. As regards the inspiration which the Christian undoubtedly does draw from the contemplation of the virtues of his Master, I have already pointed out in a previous sermon¹ that the Jew is furnished with a similar incentive to nobility of life if he will only think of it. It is to be found in the heroism of Israel, in his fortitude under unique suffering, in his living for an idea, which, considering what life has meant for him, has been even more glorious than his dying for it. Such a spectacle has this advantage over the Gospel story, that the most destructive critic cannot deny that it is historically true. It has this further advantage that it is a *living* spectacle—one on which we are gazing with our own eyes. The patience with which the Jews in Russia to-day bear their sufferings—patience inspired by devotion to the faith—is the wonder and admiration of the most sober observers in the Christendom whose creed those sufferings disgrace.² For the Israelite, then, shall they not be a mighty force impelling to a like self-surrender for the religious idea?

But this by the way. Where Judaism gains is in the simplicity of its theological teaching. The few doctrines that can fairly be deduced from the language of the Hebrew Scriptures are such as a child can under-

¹ The sermon on 'The Ideal in Judaism.' ² See Note I.

36 JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

stand. I say deduced, because the Bible does not directly enjoin belief, but conduct. It says, 'Do this,' not 'Believe this.' A certain amount of belief is necessarily assumed; we must assent, for example, to the proposition that God exists before we can be told to serve Him. But the Bible never formulates articles of faith; even the Rabbins, as a rule, shrank from formulating them. The more intrepid spirits who essayed the task found themselves at variance with each other, and the objects of hostility to many sections of Jewry. But their schemes of doctrine were put forward on their individual responsibility, never as the authoritative teaching of the Jewish Church. Many a synod has declared what is Jewish practice, but no council or conclave, with any pretensions to representative character, has ever attempted to state what is Jewish belief.

Here we have the fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity. Dogma is to the Church the very breath of life. It is the web and the woof of its system; to unravel a single thread is to endanger the whole fabric. Beyond the few simple postulates which are essential to allegiance to the religious idea and to belief in Israel as its custodian, the Jew is not bound to believe anything. Nor does a study of our ritual tend to refute this assertion. The Kabbala has now and again succeeded in

imparting a mystical flavour to Jewish ceremonial; but all that is authoritative, all that is Jewish, is the ceremonial, not the flavour. And as to the Prayer Book, one has only to think of the many phases of religious thought with which it has come into contact throughout its long life, the storms of wild speculation on the highest and holiest problems which it has weathered, in order to gauge aright the marvel that is presented by its comparative purity and simplicity.

All this is matter for sincere congratulation. In an age whose characteristic task is to simplify religion as the only alternative to seeing it perish, this doctrinal liberty becomes a very precious possession. We have no need to follow the prevailing fashion of casting off dogmatic fetters, for the excellent reason that for us such fetters do not exist. Modern thought has no terrors for the Jewish believer, because his creed in effect anticipated it centuries ago. Judaism has ever looked forward to this new intellectual era with hope, and now hails its advent with joy. Teaching, which avowedly was so framed as to be suitable for mankind only when the night of superstition should have yielded place to the dawn of enlightenment, is not likely to be put to shame, now that the day is breaking, and the shadows are fleeing away. Christianity

38 JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

won the adhesion of a pagan world two thousand years ago by swamping its Jewish elements with heathen mysticism. It purchased its popularity by debasing the doctrines of its Founder. To captivate the crowd implies exaggeration, a loss of simplicity, a loss of truth. There are those among our neighbours who are practically recognising the fact. An endeavour is being made to harmonise Christianity with modern ideas as the only chance of making it the Church of the future. What form does that endeavour take?—that of discarding those very doctrines the adoption of which made Christianity acceptable to heathendom and divorced it from Judaism. If the endeavour succeeds it will be found that a new atonement has been effected to rival that of the Cross, and that Christianity has sacrificed itself to save religion.

Whatever reconstruction Judaism is fated to undergo, we may be sure that the process will not be the equivalent of destruction, seeing that time cannot touch those few plain beliefs which constitute the essentials of the religion. Judaism, we may rejoice to think, has far more to say about human conduct than about theology; and human conduct, as Matthew Arnold has told us, is three-fourths of life. After all, whether its outcome be in collision or in agreement with the ideas of the age,

religious speculation does not make the slightest contribution to the stock of the world's happiness, nor does it appreciably increase the sum of human goodness. To know that God is, and that we owe to Him and to our fellow-men our best service, is enough—nay, it is everything; all the theology and the theosophy that has ever been invented to perplex and embroil the world cannot take us beyond this stage. On the contrary, it may divert into unprofitable channels energies that might have been devoted to that task of self-ennoblement and of bringing blessing to others which is the one mission of life. 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.'¹ This is the genius of Judaism in a few words. The Psalmist,² who declines to exercise himself in great matters or in things too wonderful for him, reflects it too. The ideal Jew does not busy himself with recondite problems. In the presence of the Divine mysteries he is dumb; he is as a little child on its mother's bosom. One only thought, one only desire, he has, and that is obedience. The effort after that self-subjugation suffices for all his energies. It is his goal, his hope, his life.

¹ Deuteronomy xxix. 29.

² Psalm cxxxi. 1.

THE SACRIFICIAL RITE

THE lessons from the Pentateuch appointed to be read in the synagogues on the next few Sabbaths¹ contain a large number of minute regulations relating to Sacrifices. The extent and elaborateness of this body of legislation sufficiently attest the importance of the place which the sacrificial rite occupied in the public worship of ancient Israel. That position it maintained until the final downfall of the Jewish State more than eighteen hundred years ago, when, with the destruction of the national sanctuary in Jerusalem, Sacrifices ceased. But despite that long interval, the interest still attaching to the old Mosaic rite is something more than merely antiquarian. The conservative Jew to this very day declines to regard the institution as dead. For him its vitality has not departed; it is merely dormant. In common with many other ordinances of the Law the sacrificial rite is in a state of suspended animation; but the Messiah will come one day and summon it back to active life. || The general idea upon

Preached in March.

David will come again!
am. restor.

which this pious expectation is founded is worthy of the deepest respect and sympathy. The belief in the Return furnishes the modern Jew with an ideal—no mean service in these days of materialism—an ideal that lifts him out of his sordid self, and tinges his soul, however faintly, with the radiance of the sublime. As such, it is to be welcomed, honoured. Happy they who share it! shame upon them who would slay it with a sneer!

But while this ennobling belief claims all our homage, we are free to reject the particular garb in which some minds may have clothed it. The doctrine of the Return, like that of a future life, is variously interpreted by diverse minds. No two pictures of Heaven are identical; and the truth holds good of the Heaven upon earth which Israel is to enjoy when he comes by his own in God's good time. All these various visions of the future of our race are true, as regards their broad features; in their details they must necessarily be more or less false. To treat all these divergent interpretations of a splendid conception as literally exact is obviously impossible; we must make our choice. In short, we have to do what others have done already—draw our own picture, dream our own dreams. In filling in the outline which Faith has dimly sketched for us, we must choose the incidents

which correspond most closely with our own aspirations. No power, save each man's imperious yearnings, can fix the individual ideal; the Kingdom of Heaven, it has been well said, is ever *within* the soul, not without it.

The pious Jew of to-day who looks forward into the future, and sees the old Temple Service restored in every detail, who beholds the victim stretched on the altar of Sacrifice, and its smoke ascending to Heaven as a sweet savour, is doubtless within his right. He gives the rein to his imagination, and his imagination is but the reflection of his spiritual state. He still worships the God of primitive Israel, still thinks that the Supreme can take pleasure in 'the blood of lambs' or 'the fat of fed beasts.' It would be useless—perhaps it would be wrong—to forbid him. But others, and we among them, are differently constituted. Our conception of God will not permit us to think that He, who is infinitely higher than the most exalted ideas that we can form of Him, can find delight in the burning Sacrifice, that He who lovingly provides for the wants of the meanest creature that breathes—He whom our conscience reveals to us as having willed that men should hold all life in veneration as one of the holiest of His mysteries—can desire the slaughter of sheep and oxen for His greater glory. We cannot

think so ; for our souls revolt at the thought. The God who loves Sacrifice is not He whom we worship, but the God of a far-off age—an age darkened by the shadows of idolatry. He is not, and never can be, our God. For it is impossible to believe that a rite which to-day seems too gross to be made a means of approaching the Almighty can ever lose its repulsiveness, ever become a fitting mode of doing honour to the Highest. The spiritual foothold we have attained can never be lost. The world cannot sink back into the abyss from which it has painfully raised itself through the centuries. The heights of sublime thought whence, through the clear air purged of earthly mists, the spirit sees God more clearly, are never abandoned for the valley below. Nay, they are but the steps to loftier peaks. As mankind grows older, it mounts ; the Divine panorama spread out before it becomes ampler, grander. In the highest sense is it true that ‘the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.’

Go back to Sacrifice when the Golden Days have come ! The idea is its own refutation. For what does it mean ? It means that the climax of the world’s progress is to be marked by a return to a barbarous worship. A rite, from the mere thought of which the best minds recoil with a shudder to-day is, in a

still nobler age, to be the chosen instrument for paying homage to the Supreme. Men are to advance in justice, in brotherly love, in wide-reaching pity for suffering, in the power of self-renunciation; in this one thing only are they to go back, and turn God's House into reeking shambles. The notion, I say, stands self-condemned. It is condemned, not only by our souls, but by our common-sense. Nay, it is condemned by Judaism itself. For the great characteristic of our religion is its optimism, its invincible faith in human progress. The world, it teaches, is assuredly moving on step by step to the Messianic age; pure religion will slowly spread among men, until the earth shall at last be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Who, then, is the true Jew? he who believes in the revival of Sacrifices, or he who denies it? He who dreams of all men casting aside their false beliefs and debasing rites, and worshipping God in purity and truth, or he who pictures them as taking up once more with the effete ceremonial of a semi-civilised world? He who sees the smoke of the Sacrifice rising once more to smell sweet in heaven, or he who holds that the path back is for ever sealed to humanity, and that never will the soul attempt to approach its God by any road save the highest?

How can the Jew who has drunk deep of the spirit of his religion hope for the restoration of Sacrifice, seeing that the hope is the very negation of his creed? It is self-contradictory for him to believe in a consummation, the possibility of which is excluded by the very idea of progress. He cannot consistently pray for it, for such a prayer would be a petition to God to reverse His beneficent plan; it would be an insult to the Divine Majesty.

But, it may be urged, what of the Bible? Sacrifice is plainly commanded, and what was pleasing to God once, may again be pleasing to Him. But surely the assumption springs from a false view of the function of worship. God does not need our adoration, much less does He desire us to express it in any particular form.¹ Communion with Him is the response, not to His need, but to ours, and the means we adopt for achieving that communion are necessarily of our choosing; they are human, not Divine, transitory, not fixed. In olden days Sacrifice inevitably occupied a large place in the Hebrew worship; for Sacrifice alone could satisfy existing needs. Even then the best minds saw in it only a temporary expedient, which would certainly and inevitably begin

¹ See Note II.

to fall into disuse on the day it lost its meaning, and ceased to be a spiritual force. This view of Sacrifice was held by the advanced thinkers of the Talmud,¹ and adopted by some of the greatest of later authorities, Maimonides and Abravanel among them.² And the attentive reader will find ample support for it in the language of the Bible itself. For what do the great Prophets and Psalmists mean when they insist upon the small value attaching to Sacrifice in the eyes of the Supreme? Why does the Psalmist cry, in words of wondrous suggestiveness, 'Sacrifice and offering Thou hast no delight in; mine ears hast Thou opened'?³ Why does he declare that 'the Sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit,'⁴ and that the Divine salvation is emphatically for him 'that ordereth his life aright'?⁵ Nay, why does Jeremiah go as far as to deny that God has ever commanded Sacrifice?⁶ Why? if it be not that, in the opinion of these great souls, the sacrificial rite was at best but a symbol, which would necessarily have to be discarded when it had outlived its purpose.

In fine, these clear-sighted men saw and taught that religion must grow if it is to live,

¹ See Note III.

³ Psalm xl. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.* l. 23.

² See Note IV.

⁴ *Ibid.* li. 17.

⁶ Jeremiah vii. 22.

and that, as the necessary result of its growth, its manifestations must be for ever changing. The Sacrifice which, under the system of the Pentateuch, was the central constituent of Divine worship, formed in the prophetic age an entirely subsidiary element, which earnest prayer and, above all, true rectitude of life, far surpassed and might even supplant. To-day, after many centuries of religious progress, we have reached still higher altitudes. We could not even tolerate Sacrifices; we shrink from them in repulsion. Religion has grown so much in that long interval that to re-clothe it in some of its old, narrow raiment, is not even to be thought of.

And so it is in regard, not only to Sacrifice, but to religious institutions generally. The observance which yesterday was living, because it drew its life's blood from union with the soul, may be already dead to-day, since there is no longer any contact with our spiritual needs to nourish it. To-morrow some of to-day's symbols, too, will have perished, and given place to more faithful exponents of our religious ideas. Those only are the true friends of Judaism who recognise this truth — nay, who see that Judaism lives at this present moment only because it has ever yielded a willing obedience to the law of change, and suffered its merely

filled + T. rosbale

outward shape to be determined by the shifting needs of successive ages. The finest minds among the Rabbins were distinguished by this insight. Jehudah the Saint once resolves on an innovation involving the relaxation of a Scriptural law. He is reproached by the more conservative Rabbins. 'What! wouldst thou permit what thy fathers before thee have ever forbidden?' 'This is my answer,' replies the great sage: 'Moses made the brazen serpent; Hezekiah, because it had become an object of idolatry, broke it in pieces. There were kings before Hezekiah, who sternly suppressed idolatrous emblems, yet spared this serpent. How could he dare to destroy what they had preserved? Yet he did it, to his everlasting honour. So, shall I shrink from initiating religious changes that the age demands, merely because my fathers remained passive? No; I claim the very changes as my merit, as a token of my zeal for the true welfare of the faith.'¹

The brazen serpent stands for every religious institution that has lost its old spiritual usefulness, and become a mere fetich. The sooner such outworn, misused elements are eliminated from religion, the better it will be for religion; and those who sweep them away, instead of being stoned as heretics,

¹ Chulin, 6 b.

ought to be crowned as faithful and far-sighted leaders. 'There are times,' says the Talmud, 'when to break the Law is to establish it more firmly than ever;' ¹ and the Talmud itself has set many an example of this pious disobedience. Why not? For what is the object of religion but to make the higher life possible, to lead men nearer to God. And if, owing to the revolution that time has wrought in man himself, the ritual law no longer ministers to the spirit, but fetters it and chains it down, the breaking of the bonds becomes a duty. And who can doubt the magnitude of the gain which, in the case of Sacrifice, comes from this liberation? Bound no longer to consider it an essential of the Mosaic system, free to strike out the rite from our pictures of the future, able to think of God as the God of love, who delighteth not in the pain or the death of the humblest creature, and to depict men worshipping Him in the coming time with their prayers and their lives alone—this is a blessed freedom indeed. It is a freedom which rivets the yoke of our religion about our necks, and makes us glory more than ever in the name of Israel.

¹ Menachoth, 99 b.

THE MOSAIC DIETARY LAWS

‘Ye shall therefore make a distinction between the clean beast and the unclean, and between the unclean fowl and the clean. . . . And ye shall be holy unto Me, for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the peoples that ye should be Mine.—LEVIT. xx. 25, 26.

THE principal contents of the weekly section of the Pentateuch which was read in the synagogues this morning suggest the Mosaic dietary laws as an appropriate subject for this address. We must not assume that the primary object of those laws was the promotion of health. It is to be found rather in the maintenance of the superior holiness and the racial distinctness of Israel. The Pentateuch nowhere declares these prescriptions to be hygienic. The only explanation given is that contained in expressions similar to the text : ‘Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the peoples, that ye should be Mine.’ On the other hand, it cannot be a mere coincidence that the dietary laws of the Pentateuch, unlike those still obeyed by the Hindu or the

Parsee, which are of a purely religious character, are every day more clearly demonstrated by the results of scientific investigation to possess a high sanitary value. It is impossible to doubt that, whatever may have been the main object which these laws were intended to promote, some of them, at least, were enacted with the view of favourably influencing the health of the race. This, too, was an object to be attained, though a subsidiary one. The physical toughness of the Jewish people, its power of resisting certain maladies, its superior vitality, are scientifically demonstrable facts; and their explanation is to be sought for, among other circumstances, in the cumulative effects of an observance of the dietary laws continued through many centuries.

But the language of the Mosaic code is sufficiently explicit to show that the chief purpose of these prescriptions was a religious, rather than a sanitary one. Israel, as the text indicates clearly enough, was by their operation to be made holy, even as God is holy, and so to be kept a distinct race. Now, 'holiness' in the Pentateuch is a very comprehensive term. It implies the avoidance of every source of defilement, moral, intellectual, and even physical. It is the ground on which not only sensuality, but superstition too, is

forbidden, and on which is based a superficially commonplace command like that enjoining the hiding in the earth of camp-refuse.¹ It is obvious, then, that when we meet with the word 'holiness' in the Law, we are in the presence of ideas differing from those that are conventionally associated with the expression. The sanctity enjoined meant self-dedication to God, to match the Divine consecration of the race — the self-dedication befitting Israel in its character of a Kingdom of Priests. Thus, many acts, morally permissible, were to be considered forbidden, because they were unbecoming in God's elect.

For if we confine ourselves to the ordinary sense of the word Holiness, it is not easy to understand how abstinence from certain kinds of meat can sanctify a man, or how eating them can defile him. This was the difficulty of the early Christians, who declared that 'the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.'² But such protests against the confusion of merely ceremonial purity with moral and spiritual sanctity arose out of an imperfect sympathy with the genius of Mosaism. Obedience to the dietary regulations is never recommended as a substitute for righteousness and

¹ Levit. xix. 1 *seq.*; xx. 6, 7, 26; xxi. 5, 6; Deut. xxiii. 14.

² Romans xiv. 17.

purity of heart, as every line of the Pentateuch testifies, nor as constituting sanctity in itself, but as a means of promoting holiness, personal, but racial more especially. Israel is God's people; he is therefore to avoid every act that can possibly clash with the idea of his consecration. Thus he was to keep aloof from every defiling thing, not the morally abominable merely, but even that which was only sentimentally repulsive—not only from the degrading sensuality of the heathen, but from those kinds of food which were either in themselves unclean, or which were declared to be so by the Law. In short, Israel was to show himself a people superior in every way to the surrounding nations. The very food he ate was to mark him out as a nation apart—to sustain his character as the chosen of God. The hygienic value of the dietary laws may have furnished a subsidiary reason for their enactment. But unless we are to ignore the language of passages like our text, we must conclude that the chief aim was to ensure at once the sanctity and the survival of Israel by assigning to him a range of duties both distinct from, and higher than those devolving upon men in general. The dietary prescriptions, indeed, are but one example among many of those specific ordinances which impose upon the Israelite responsibilities

from which the rest of humanity is free, and which just for that very reason—just because they tend to make him nobler than his neighbours—ought to secure his loyalty in every age.

And thus we approach the practical side of our subject. The dietary laws ought to be binding on the conscience of every Jew, liberal as well as conservative. And it follows from what I have said that the motive for obeying them ought to coincide with the motive which led to their enactment. It should be a religious motive. I cannot quarrel with that large number of my brethren who respect these laws solely because of their sanitary value. Better obedience of this sort than no obedience at all. But there is a vast difference between the self-restraint which is dictated by mere prudential considerations, and that which is imposed by reverence for a lofty ideal. The man who avoids alcoholic liquors because he fears the evil effects of drunkenness on his health or his worldly prospects, is a wise and, to some extent, a worthy man; but he is not to be compared for moral excellence with his neighbour who abstains because intemperance in his eyes would be a degradation of his manhood. It is so with the laws we are discussing. To obey them in a cold spirit of calculation, from a recognition of

the fact that submission pays, and that there is some profit in serving God, is preferable to rebelling against them ; but morally the underlying motive is not of a very respectable order. That obedience of this kind happens to be Jewish is a mere accident. It is clearly not rendered in the name of Judaism, but in the name of health. The deity worshipped is Hygieia—or shall we say Self?—not the Lord God of Israel. To base respect for these laws on such grounds is, moreover, a somewhat unsafe proceeding. For he who does so is necessarily blown about by every wind of hygienic doctrine, and it may happen that the food he holds to be prohibited to-day, he may to-morrow find permissible, owing to the removal of the medical ban. The opposite process has already taken place with rather startling results. It used to be the fashion to declare that the unclean animals of the Pentateuch were proscribed because their flesh was necessarily unwholesome in a warm climate like that of Palestine, but that the prohibition was devoid of force in more northern latitudes. Those who ate ham on the strength of this comfortable reasoning suddenly turned round one day, and became orthodox, when that terrible disease *trichinosis* was proved to be no respecter of geography.

Obedience to these laws may, if necessary,

be fortified by the remembrance of their sanitary character; but it should rest on a higher and a surer foundation. Every Jew who makes the distinction between the clean beast and the unclean, which is enjoined by the text, should do so in the spirit of the text—with the desire to maintain the separateness of Israel, and to maintain it through Israel's superior holiness. And herein lies the answer to those who, following in the wake of the apostle of old, scoff to-day at a religion which lays so much stress on eating and drinking, and declare, in their turn, that 'not that which entereth into the mouth defileth a man.'¹ If Judaism were a string of unmeaning ritual observances, it would deserve the sneer. But, seeing that its regulations in regard to food are designed to achieve a high spiritual purpose, the objection falls to the ground. If our eating and drinking are not sufficiently worthy acts to be done in the name of religion, we must, in order to be logical, eliminate the unleavened bread from among the symbols of Passover. We have not arrived at that point yet; but there is no reason why the unleavened bread should be exempt from the critical objection which is making havoc of the dietary laws.

The truth is, that what entereth into the

¹ Matt. xv. 11.

mouth *does* defile, if its entrance is due to a conscious breaking with religious duty. The separateness of Israel must be assured—the Kingdom of Priests must be preserved among the congregation of humanity—by observances that differentiate it sharply from the rest of the world. It is the same idea over again that keeps the high-caste Brahmin a personage distinct from his fellows; only in the case of the Jew the idea rests on the noblest basis. We would keep ourselves distinct, not because we have a contempt for our neighbours, or because we despise the world, but because such distinctiveness is the only means of ensuring the performance of our great mission. Far from contemning our fellow-men, it is the essential condition of the accomplishment of our Divinely-appointed task that we should love and respect them. Far from despising the world, we have to mingle with it in order to scatter the spiritual seed we have treasured up through the ages. Separatism is not necessarily isolation, and the Ghetto was not the Jew's handiwork. Our place is emphatically in the world; but the part we have to play there is that of Israelites, not, as an able writer¹ has aptly expressed it, that of 'religious cosmopolitans.' If Judaism is to perform its

¹ Mrs. Henry Lucas in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* for April 1890.

errand it must live, and to live it must be Judaism, not vague Theism. How it is to be anything else without these distinctive laws I know not, nor do I believe any one can tell me.

But, as I have hinted, the separation of Israel is not the sole object which these precepts are designed to accomplish. Moral purity is also their aim. For what does obedience to them involve but the best form of self-restraint—the restraint of the animal appetites? Looking at the whole body of Levitical legislation, and seeing how it evidently aimed at the regulation of sensual desires of all kinds, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that this was one of the objects of the dietary laws.¹ This ‘religion,’ then, ‘of pots and pans’ is a far nobler system than the superfine and convenient one which some of us are inclined to construct. I cannot but disapprove of the religious narrowness which makes many an untutored Jew see in his distinctions between *Kosher* and *Trifa* the very acme of spiritual effort. But he is at least entitled to the merit of suppressing his appetites from a sense of duty; and I leave it to you to decide whether he is not more to be respected than the Jew who eats what he likes with a fine impartiality, or even than the Jew

¹ See Note V.

who only does not eat what he likes because he fears for his health.

So long as self-conquest is noble, so long will these laws be worth preserving, and obedience to them be a mark of nobility. Is there not something spiritually attractive in the idea of the Jew of this age voluntarily submitting to restrictions on his appetites for the sake of duty—forming one of a religious guild, whose special characteristic is its self-control. The very difficulties in the way of such a subjugation of self make its accomplishment all the more honourable. The dietary laws are for this nineteenth century just because their spirit is directly antagonistic to the self-indulgent temper which is the mark of the age. It ought to be the pride of the modern Jew—and every child should be taught to feel it—that his religion demands from him a self-abnegation from which other religionists are absolved, that the price to be paid for the privilege of belonging to the hierarchy of Israel is continuous and conscious self-sacrifice. Yes, conscious self-sacrifice which involves all the pain of the inward struggle. The Rabbins have well said that the right temper of the observant Israelite is expressed, not in the words, ‘I have no desire for forbidden food,’ but in the words, ‘I desire, but I will refrain.’¹

¹ Siphra on Levit. xx. 26.

60 THE MOSAIC DIETARY LAWS

The conquest of this specific longing is in itself a meritorious achievement. 'He,' say the Rabbins, 'who deliberately and forcibly restrains himself from sinning has already entered into the Kingdom of Heaven.'¹ Can we doubt that the obedience enjoined by the text has a general disciplinary value, and that the suppression of one set of unworthy longings suggests and aids the struggle with sensual desire generally? The power to perform one duty, the Mishnah reminds us,² begets the power to perform many; and it is so of obedience to these misunderstood and much maligned dietary laws. Respect for them tends to brace up the moral energies; it is a discipline which affects the entire character, and enables the Jew to battle successfully with self, whatever its promptings, to resist temptation, whatever its seductive form, to abase his desires, in Rabbinic language, before the will of his Father in Heaven.³

Those, then, who lightly esteem these old-world precepts are ill-advised, from the moral, as well as from the religious point of view. It is a spurious liberalism that would break with them. For to-day, despite the lapse of ages, the ideal of the text is living, glorious—worthy of all our loyalty, all our love. 'Ye shall be holy unto Me, for I the Lord am holy,

¹ Siphra on Levit. xx. 26. ² Aboth, iv. 2. ³ *Ibid.* ii. 4.

and I have separated you from the peoples that ye should be Mine.'

Let us write these words on our hearts; for they contain the whole philosophy of Judaism.

ISRAEL'S WATCH-NIGHT

'It is a night of watching unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt : this is that night of the Lord, a night of watching for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.'—EXODUS xii. 42.

AMONG our neighbours the custom prevails of marking the advent of a new year with a solemn religious Service at midnight. The midnight bell peals forth its message to the congregation as they kneel in silent prayer. It is an impressive ceremony—this watching for the first footsteps of the coming guest, whose hands are filled with happiness and sorrow, with good and evil, with life and death—this lifting of the heart at so momentous a juncture to God in Heaven. But we Jews also have our watch-night, though we may hardly recognise it when it comes—a watch-night as full of stirring associations, as pregnant with spiritual possibilities. It is the night which ushers in the Passover. No special rite marks the advent of the other Festivals of the Jewish year. The Passover alone has its solemn prelude, which suffices to impart a tone of

sanctity to the entire Feast. It comes to find all Israel engaged in a worship that is unique. The scattered members of each household are reassembled, and it is amid their united thanksgivings and supplications to the God of their fathers that the Festival enters. Verily, in the words lisped by the youngest of that band of worshippers, it is a night 'distinguished from all other nights'—distinguished by the Service of prayer and song with which it is greeted, by the old-world observances which carry the celebrants back thousands of years, by the holy feeling which separates it from nearly all its companions in the Calendar, and consecrates it to God. And so, a watch-night it is, a night marked out as religion's own, a night to be passed with hearts open to catch every word, every tone, of its thrilling story.

Centuries ago this sacred character was assigned to it. Israel's great watch-night dates its origin from the very Deliverance it was to commemorate through all the coming years. Ah! with what a delicious impatience did Pharaoh's slaves await the midnight hour that was to be at once the knell of Egypt's tyranny and the joy-note that announced their own freedom! How anxiously did Israel listen for that sweetest of all sounds—'the voice of the Beloved leaping upon the mountains,' the

voice of the Bridegroom calling to His bride, 'Rise up, my love, and come away.'¹ Yes, for that night was a night of watching for a Higher than Israel. God Himself had singled it out as the time for fulfilling His ancient promise—singled it out, as the Rabbins tell us in hyperbolical language, from the days of Creation itself.² This was the night on which His holy arm was to be made bare, and His justice vindicated. Too long had unrighteousness flourished; but now it was to bite the dust. Too long had God seemed to slumber in His Heaven; but now He was to show that the cry of the oppressed had never failed to reach Him, for accumulated wrongs were to be redressed by a complete and unparalleled deliverance. It was for so signal a vindication of the Divine justice that this night was reserved. The text declares it: 'It is a night of watching unto the Lord, for bringing them out from the land of Egypt.' It was as though the Supreme had set His finger upon this night in the almanac of Heaven, and declared, 'This shall witness the long-deferred triumph of Right over Might; this shall tell for all time that I am the Lord, that I reign, and that righteousness and justice are the foundation of My throne, the principles on

¹ Canticles ii. 8, 10.

² Rosh Hashanah, 11 b.

which I govern My world. This night shall show to all coming generations that it is only the fool who says in his heart "There is no God," that the earthly despot who pursues his career of cruelty, thinking that he has only his victim's tears to reckon with, is deluding himself to his own ruin, that the unbeliever who cries, "Who is the Lord? I know him not,"¹ shall sooner or later find his ignorance rudely dispelled, his obstinacy utterly broken down, by the force of his own bitter experiences.'

And is this truth not worth treasuring in these latter days? Often does God seem to hide Himself, to have deserted earth and shut Himself up in heaven. The wicked, and not the righteous, flourish like the palm-tree, and grow like the cedar in Lebanon. It is the souls of the meek and the faithful from which humanity's tears are distilled, from which the painful chorus of a world's lament goes up, and seemingly goes up in vain.

But the lesson taught to Pharaoh and to Israel on that awful, that joyous night of deliverance, is still a living lesson; not one jot of its force is abated. God neither slumbers nor sleeps. He watches ever. Not one sigh passes unrecorded in the Heavenly volume; not one wrongful deed or impious thought but falls on fruitful-soil whence it will spring

Exodus v. 2.

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again, a harvest after its kind. That harvest may be delayed, but come it will ; and it must be gathered to the last sheaf. In taking sin into his life the sinner takes into it the germ of retribution—retribution none the less real because his eyes alone behold it. Read your own hearts, my friends, and you may, however dimly, recognise this truth ; and if you could read the hearts of your fellow-men—of those you meet day by day, wearing, it may be, a smile on their face, and treading the earth with light and jaunty step—you would recognise it more clearly still.

This, then, is the first lesson taught by our watch-night—the lesson of the sleepless justice of God, which brings home at last the sin to the guilty, and which remembers pitifully, lovingly, every suffering soul that sin has wronged. It is a lesson that cries out to us as men to abandon the folly which dreams that there is neither God nor law, and that there can be impunity for rebellion ; but it is a lesson, too, that comes to us as Jews with healing on its wings. For at this Passover-tide, when we would fain welcome the approaching Feast with meet sentiments of gladness, the spectre of Russian tyranny and all its attendant woe for our brethren, rises up and forbids our joy. Ah ! with what anguish will not the Russian Jew engage in rites that can

only be called festive in bitter irony! For him the Seder-night this year comes in truth at a time of weary watching—of watching for justice, for God, ‘more than they that look for the morning.’¹ Well may he conform to ancient usage, and greet the Passover in the shrouds of the dead; for dead are his joys, his hopes, and there are dear ones torn from his arms by cruel tyranny, of whom he cannot but think with unutterable sadness at a time which has ever been one of re-union for Jewish hearts. But still the ancient, the eternal truth whispers to him and to us its consoling message. Not for ever shall this foul wrong go unheeded, unredressed. ‘We may die in exile,’ cries a heroic woman, not of our race, doomed to end her days in the living death of Siberian torture, ‘we may die in exile, and our children may die in exile, and our children’s children may die in exile, but something will come of it at last.’² The words have a prophetic ring. Something *will* come of it at last. The woe endured by the hated Jew, as well as by the dread revolutionary, will yield its fruit in its due season, when ‘the iniquity of the Amorite shall be full.’³ The God who ransomed Israel in olden days shall redeem him

¹ Psalm cxxx. 6.

² Farewell words of Madame Breshkofskaya to Mr. George Kennan. See his *Siberia and the Exile System*, vol. ii. p. 122.

³ Genesis xv. 16.

once again. A second time shall the Lord put forth His hand to recover the despised, the down-trodden remnant of His people.

And so we reach the second lesson of the text. The night that ushers in the Passover is a night of watching, not only for the Lord, but 'for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.' Three nights hence¹ we may watch in company with the Highest. God has marked out the coming Festival for us; let us mark it out for Him, devote it to His service, so use the modern Seder-night as to justify the ancient exclamation, 'This is that night of the Lord.' Ah! what a glorious message may it pour into our souls if we will but listen! This old Seder-service, with its seemingly antiquated symbols—how living it may be! dumb as it appears, how eloquent! For, reminding us by each emblem on our table, each line in our prayer-book, of the revelation of the Divine justice, not only in the days of Pharaoh or in the life of our people, but in the careers of all nations throughout the whole course of the world's history, it brings us face to face with God. It tells us that Religion's everlasting tale is true, echoed as it is in the life-story of the entire human race. It tells us that the fables and the myths are not in the minds of those

¹ Preached on the Sabbath before Passover, 5652-1892.

who believe in God, but in the minds of those who deny Him. But it emphasises this truth by fixing our gaze on the life of Israel. 'Behold him,' it cries, 'keeping this Passover after thousands of years, celebrating the old deliverance, preaching the old truths, living the old life. What does this phenomenon mean? What means this unchangeableness among so much that is changeable, if not a Divinely-appointed destiny and therefore a Divine hand to assign it?' Shall not our watch-night, then, bind us with stronger bonds than ever to God who has been our Shepherd all our life long even unto this day? Shall it not cast us down at His feet, and bid us sob forth our sorrow for our waywardness, our vow of renewed obedience, our promise of fealty to the old covenant?

My brethren, the Passover has ever been the Festival of Hope—hope taught by the memory of freedom that blessed our fathers after weary years of waiting—hope whispered by the spring-time that emancipates Nature from the long-continued thralldom of the winter. Let it teach that lesson to us above every other—teach us to hope in God, not to let the conviction of His rectitude, His mercy, slip from us—no, though our experiences shriek against the creed with a thousand voices. Let it teach us also to hope in the God of our fathers, to believe in His promise

which suffering has written with pen of fire on the heart of our race—the promise that Israel shall not perish, but that he shall stand up in his appointed place among the nations at the end of the days, in the Golden Age of universal peace and brotherhood. Throughout the long night of its agony—a watch-night indeed—our people cherished that hope; and shall we, now that the shadows are fleeing before the dawn, part with it? Three nights hence, following the old, beautiful custom, we shall fill the wine-cup for the expectant visitant, Elijah, the herald of the Messianic time. Let that be no unmeaning ceremony. In former days when protracted suffering might well have justified despair, our fathers still performed the act that spoke so eloquently of faith—faith in their own beautiful dreams and in God's promise—still laid for the guest that never came, and that seemed to have no thought of coming. But we live in happier times. We are the heirs to all the encouragement bequeathed by centuries of progress. Let us, then, hope; it is the one central lesson of Judaism, with its sublime optimism, its constant protest against the philosophy of our day, which regards humanity as the sport of evil forces, and life as bondage to a pitiless fate. Let us believe that, despite the evil within and

without him, man has the power to rise, that he *is* rising, that despite frequent stumbling the world is slowly climbing upwards. 'Blessed is he that waiteth,' cried the angelic voice to the dreaming Seer of old,¹ and blessed indeed are those of our day who, refusing to part with their healthful, life-giving faith in humanity, in God, watch and wait for the final deliverance of mankind from the servitude of sin and suffering—a deliverance which is to crown Israel with glory by vindicating his creed.

This is the message that is breathed into our souls by the initial Service of the Passover. Once with its fascinating tale of the Egyptian redemption it kept earnest Sages sleepless through the livelong night till the time of morning prayer.² May *our* watch-night come, and find us also with hearts awake—awake with wonder and gratitude for all the salvation of the past, but awake, too, with hope in a yet greater salvation, which, extending beyond the House of Israel, shall shed its blessing on all mankind. Ay, let its message carry us too in spirit, as it carried those old Rabbins, to the dawn—to the dawn of God's day, humanity's day, to the time of the *Shemang*, when the cry 'The Lord is our God, the Lord is One,' shall ring forth, not from our lips alone, but from the mouth of all flesh.

¹ Daniel xii. 12.

² Haggadah for Passover.

THE PENITENTIAL SEASON

‘Come, and let us return unto the Lord ; for He hath torn, and He will heal us ; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us ; on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him.’—HOSEA vi. 1, 2.

IT is at a singularly appropriate season that we resume these Services. The Days of Penitence are exerting their solemn influence upon us, and now, if ever, our worship will be earnest, our efforts to find God will be blessed. Truly may we cry with the Psalmist, ‘My prayer cometh unto Thee, O Lord, at an acceptable time ; O God, in Thine abundant mercy, answer me with Thy sure salvation.’¹ But to this we may fitly add yet another entreaty—an entreaty that the forces which are at this moment impelling us to approach the Divine footstool in prayer and submission may make themselves felt on every occasion when we assemble for worship, to lift not only our hearts but our lives nearer to Heaven.

‘Come, and let us return unto the Lord ; for He hath torn, and He will heal us ; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.’ Here is a

¹ Psalm lxix. 13.

soul crying out in the hour of its direst need. It is a soul that has fallen away from duty, from God, to its own inevitable hurt. It has sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it hath profited nothing. Nay, affliction has overtaken it as the very consequence of its waywardness. It is racked by worldly sorrows, or perhaps it is writhing under the stinging lash of remorse. Whatever form the retribution may have taken, here is this soul yearning to go back to the God it has forsaken. It has tasted the pleasures of sin, and found them bitter; the tempting grapes have proved grapes of gall. There is no peace, no joy for this soul, save in the company of God. And so the culprit will return. His pangs do not deter him from the effort, though he knows they are the signs of the Divine displeasure. He is estranged from God, but he knows that the unfailing love of the All-Father will take him back. The hand that has dealt the wound will pour into it the soothing balm. God hath torn, but He will heal.

Surely, the text is a picture of our own spiritual condition at this moment. There are times in life, and this is one of them, when dissatisfaction with ourselves, with our ideals, our pursuits, our pleasures, is our one dominant feeling. We measure ourselves against the standard of goodness laid down by

conscience, and are appalled to find how miserably short we fall of it. It is as though a mirror were suddenly held before our lives, and we saw ourselves as we really are in one swift glance. The saddening vision may last but for an instant; one look, perhaps, and then the glass is snatched away. Alas, that the vision should be so transient; but, fleeting though it is, it at least fills us with a longing to be nobler, to put our days to higher uses, to diminish the gap between the ideal and the real, to abridge the space that sunders us here on earth from God in heaven. Sorrow for our shortcomings takes hold of us. We despise ourselves; we loathe our moral weakness, the frailty that makes us the sport of every gust of passion, that gives us as victims to every passing suggestion of self-interest. We hate ourselves for our degradation, for the shameful desire which drags us down, for our tame yielding to the solicitations of sin when we know that we possess the power of mastering it. And while thus we realise how low we have fallen, we think of God, and yearn to go back to Him, to find relief from our self-reproaches in His forgiveness, and to make the reconciliation the starting-point of a new life.

There are few of us, I think, who do not feel these flashes of self-recognition, these

waves of self-contempt, at some period in life. They come sometimes unexpected, unbidden, at those strange moments when a sudden soberness, a strange misgiving, steals over us in the very midst of our worldly preoccupations—proceeding we know not whence. A sense of the unfruitfulness of our life, the poverty of our aims, the thought that we are for ever pursuing shadows, fills and casts down our hearts. Or our self-dissatisfaction comes, perhaps, when we have left our artificial world behind us for a time, and we are face to face with nature. The silence and majesty of the everlasting hills, the broad ocean stretching far beyond our ken, the sad splendour of the sunset, the landscape bathed in the weird moonlight—these will stir within us vague yearnings for a life that is larger than our own, for the realisation of greater possibilities than we dream of in our worldly moments. Or this dissatisfied feeling comes at moments of crisis when some grave event in our personal experiences has profoundly moved us, when the fountains of the great deep within are broken up, and the windows of heaven are flung open. It is usually some overwhelming trouble that stirs us thus powerfully. Just as they say that a drowning man sees the whole of his life pass before him in one swift panorama, so our true self will stand revealed in the terrible moment

when calamity sweeps over us. Some heavy worldly loss it may be, or the break-up of health and strength which leaves us utterly helpless, or the passing hence of a beloved one, when we recognise with dismay and despair that the light has gone out of our life never to return—any of these disasters will suffice to bring home to us not only the uncertainty of our most precious possessions, but the need of shifting the whole centre of gravity of our life, of making a more resolute attempt to be at one with the Almighty. Like Jonah we come face to face in the storm with the God whose presence we have shunned, whose will we have lightly esteemed, and straightway we humble ourselves before Him, freely confessing our folly and our disobedience.

But see how benign is religion! It is a terrible thing to have to learn our moral state from calamity, to be brought to our knees in penitence by the anguish of self-contempt, to crawl back in shame to God, only when our idols have played us false. God would ensure us a happier fate. He offers us an opportunity of knowing the truth about ourselves, and of performing the practical duty which the knowledge irresistibly suggests, without suffering one pang save that of contrition. We need not wait for a crisis to come and extort the truth from us, as men were

once made to testify to the faith by being broken on the rack. No ; year after year this season returns, with its call to repentance, eloquent of a love, a pity, a sympathetic recognition of human needs, that is Divine. 'Return, ye erring children,' it cries in the name of the Most High, 'I will heal your waywardness. Let not your self-reproaches keep you back. My love is all-powerful ; it will receive you, it will comfort you. If you suffer because of the thought of your disobedience, you shall suffer no more.' Wise indeed are they who heed the sublime message, who, touched by its very mercifulness, hasten to lay the homage of their contrition before the Throne of Grace, who read, and judge, and reform their lives under the tranquil influences of these days, who discern their God in the still small voice of His loving appeal, and wait not till He is revealed by the mighty tempest of His rebuke.

For this solemn season responds to the cry that goes up ever and anon from every human soul, and which will ever be wrung from it as long as humanity endures. It is not only that we wish to live more nobly than we do ; we long to be assured that the very wish is to be trusted. We would be convinced that the mere idea of goodness is not a delusion, that in clinging to it amid the awful temptations of life we are fastening ourselves to a safe

anchorage. We would be certain that God is, and that He is on the side of right; and in the message of the season this imperious need of ours is satisfied. 'O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down,'¹ is the prophet's cry; and for us it is answered. Almost in spite of ourselves we come on these days face to face with the Highest. We are the same men and women that we were before this solemn period set in, and yet the crust of our selfishness, our materialism, is pierced by some mysterious force, and, behold, we are at God's feet, denying Him no longer, denying only ourselves. We do not debate the question in these days whether there is a God, whether religion is truth, nay, whether duty is a real voice, and not a mocking echo. We know it, we feel it. It is as though the sign we are always tacitly asking for amid the storm and stress of life were vouchsafed to us, and compelled our belief, our implicit trust. God lives, and to be true to our highest instincts is His law, our law—this is the good news that now is whispered to us, and the gates of our heart fly open of their own accord to receive it. Our ready acceptance of the revelation is the surest proof of its truth. The bondage of the world has only to be relaxed for a while, as it is at

¹ Isaiah lxiv. 1.

this season, the noise of the madding crowd has only to be shut out for a space, and the inner voices will make themselves heard, the eternal truths will assert themselves and conquer. It is the soul testifying to its great Author, proclaiming the verities which are part of itself, singing the songs it learnt in Heaven!

Our very acceptance of the message, I say, proves its truth. Let us make every allowance for the influence of custom, of an almost craven fear of some dread punishment which neglect of these days will involve, and still the response to the call of this penitential season is a witness to the veracity of religion. The whole current of a life is not to be stayed by fictions. Men do not forsake the world for the house of prayer, and yield themselves up to the sway of a higher law, even though it be but for a small fragment of the year, except in obedience to some overmastering need, some stern command from their inner selves which they dare not neglect.

Well, then, may we cherish these holy days—cherish them for the certainty they bring us of the truths which lie at the very foundation of the moral life—cherish them for the opportunity they give us for a more determined attempt to make that life ours. Ah, my brethren, what may not these

days do for us if we will only use them well! They may put into us a new heart and a new spirit. They may winnow the grain from the chaff, driving out many a failing from our characters as with the very breath of Heaven. They may lead us back to God, and, placing our hand in His, help us to walk with Him ever, as did the saints of old, to keep Him as our companion, the source of our strength and encouragement, for the rest of life. Familiar as these days are, they still mark a crisis, though a peaceful one, in our spiritual career. What we are to be for the whole of this new-born year—perhaps for the whole of the succeeding years, down to the day of our death and the solution of the dread mystery—hangs upon the use we make of this solemn time. For it is not in human nature to create for itself an opportunity such as this. Once gone it returns not, if it returns at all, until another year comes, and offers it to us again. In a higher than their literal sense the words of the liturgy are true. Our destiny—our spiritual destiny—is written down on New Year's Day, and sealed on the Day of Atonement. We write it down in the penitence with which we greet the dawn of the year; we seal it with the amendment which we solemnly vow on the great Fast of Kippur. The time for penitence is with us

still; the Fast with its supreme task awaits us. Let us use both. To-day and to-morrow¹ let our endeavours to see ourselves as we really are, our sorrow for our shortcomings, the unrest of our unshriven souls, prepare us for the final act of atonement—atonement only to be achieved by a fixed determination to improve, from which no temptation, however powerful, however insidious, shall make us swerve. Then shall the concluding promise of the text be fulfilled for us in our turn: ‘After two days God will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him.’ The Day of Atonement shall lead us, with hearts bowed in submission, to the Divine feet; and God will bend from His high throne and lovingly lift us up, absolved, forgiven. Filled with His spirit—the spirit of faith and loving obedience—we shall begin to live at last, to live before Him, to live the true life which is inspired by the constant thought of His presence.

And do Thou, O merciful Father, stretch forth Thy supporting hand to us at this solemn time. Help us to draw near to Thee. Give us the power we so sorely lack to break with evil, ay, to see that we have done evil, and that there is aught in us that calls for

¹ Preached two days before the Fast of Atonement.

amendment. Help us in our weakness. If some faint resolve to do better, to stay our waste of the precious years, stirs in our hearts, do Thou make it strong. If a glimpse of Thee comes to us in our prayers, let it deepen into an abiding vision. O God, we throw ourselves utterly on Thy mercy. Think not, we beseech Thee, of what we ought to be; take us as we are, with all our imperfections, all our rebellion, all our ingratitude, and fold us in Thy forgiving embrace. We do not ask to be saved from the consequences of our misdeeds; we only ask for the assurance that we are restored to Thy love, that Thou dost not any longer deem us fallen, that Thy face is turned to us once more.

Father, do not cast us off. If one ray of sincerity lights up our soul, let it plead for us. If one fervent prayer trembles on our lips, take it as our atonement. Though it be our one angel among a thousand, let it be our ransom.

Bless us on the coming great day of the Lord. May it help us to find Thee; and, having found Thee, may we never let Thee go! May it be for us the beginning of a new life—a life led for Thee, for our fellow-men, for our true selves! Amen.

THE CRUSE THAT FAILED NOT

‘The cruse of oil shall not fail until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.’—1 KINGS xvii. 14.

THE Rabbins¹ quote a well-known legend to account for the circumstance that the celebration of the Feast of Chanucah extends over eight days. It is said that when the victorious Maccabees re-entered the Temple, which had been profaned by the idolatrous rites of the Greek worship, they found only one small flask of consecrated oil, the seal of which remained intact. The quantity was sufficient to keep the lamp of the Sanctuary burning for one night only; but, a miracle being wrought, it lasted for eight nights, by which time arrangements were made for a continuous supply of holy oil. The perpetual lamp, thus re-lighted, justified its name, and continued thenceforth to burn without interruption.

The story has long since come to be regarded as a mere legend; it is not even alluded to in the old Chanucah prayer which

¹ Sabbath, 21 b.

we have repeated this afternoon. We have learnt to seek for the origin of this eight-day celebration in less miraculous circumstances. When Judas Maccabæus and his pious followers dedicated the Temple anew, their thoughts must have instinctively turned to the consecration of Israel's first sanctuary, the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. That ancient ceremony had extended over eight days, and in imitation of it, the rites which constituted the formal re-dedication of the Temple by the Maccabees were continued for the same period. This, doubtless, is the true explanation of a fact which the popular imagination, with its characteristic love for the supernatural, afterwards invented a miracle to account for. It is also possible that the story partly derived its shape from the chief thought which is suggested by the circumstances under which the Maccabees achieved their memorable triumph. That triumph was won by a handful of untrained peasants fighting against legions, strong both in numbers and in military experience. The revolt of the Jews against Greek oppression was more than a forlorn hope; it seemed the act of desperate men, who had no resource left them but a brave and an honourable death. The nationality of Israel, nay, the religion from which it drew its sustenance, was at the point of

destruction. And yet both were wondrously saved. The small remnant of the faithful were victorious, and resuscitated the religion and the commonwealth. The sacred flame that was so near to extinction, fed by the devoted hands of the warriors, and blessed by the Divine protection, continued to burn, and has burnt ever since. The little cruse of oil sufficed, not for one day, but for many days.

It is possible, I say, that this idea has helped to shape the ancient story. At any rate, we of this latter age may discern this meaning in it. Still regarding it as one of those legends which, as all history tells us, are wont to cluster in course of time about great personages and stirring episodes, we may, nevertheless, see in it a figurative suggestion of the triumph of Judaism in the Macca-bæan age, and the promise of its repetition in the coming days. Those who still adhere to the old and good custom of kindling the Chanucah lights, are able, so to speak, to make the legend live in concrete form. Every night the lamps increase in number. At first there is but one feeble flame, whose precarious life may be suddenly terminated by a sharp movement of the air; but it multiplies into many flames at last, which give forth a powerful light, and one not easily

86 THE CRUSE THAT FAILED NOT

quenched. And so, both the legend and the characteristic ceremony of the Feast bring vividly before the mind the true significance of the achievements wrought by the Maccabees. Taking their lives in their hands, they boldly threw themselves upon the redoubtable phalanx of the Greeks, and by their self-sacrificing valour gave new life to their people and their faith. That they saved Jewish independence for the two hundred years it was destined still to live, is certain. But no less certain is it that they saved *Judaism*—saved it, not for two or three centuries, but for all the centuries that have intervened between their day and ours. Upon this point let there be no doubt. Greek persecution and Jewish apostasy were combining their forces at that time to destroy Israel's religion in Judæa and in the East generally. Their success would have meant the total disappearance of Judaism from the world; for once cut off from the source of its inspiration, Palestine, the religion of the Jews of the West would soon have come to an end.

The Maccabees, then, saved their ancestral faith for their age; but they saved it, too, for each succeeding age. For never since their day has there been a crisis in its fortunes like that which they had to confront—no, not even when the Temple fell 200 years later, and brought down Jewish nationality with it. By

that time Judaism had made itself independent of Palestine and of Israel's political life. Above all, the labours of the early Rabbins had made the religion itself into an effective bond which sufficed to ensure the cohesion and the preservation of the race, whatever the disasters that might in future overtake it. By the time the Temple sank in the flames that crowning calamity had been prepared for, and its worst consequences averted. But the period of preparation, so necessary, so momentous, was only made possible by the exploits of the Maccabees. If their enthusiasm had been less fervent, their self-devotion less generous, or if they had failed, then Judaism would have perished forthwith, and there would have been no opportunity for the saving efforts of the Rabbins in after-days—nay, there would have been no Rabbins to make those efforts.

It is well that we should bear this truth in mind, for it supplies those of us with their justification who insist upon the importance of this Dedication Feast, and upon the necessity of securing for it increased stability in this age. True it is that the tale of splendid heroism which is associated with the Festival is in itself an all-sufficient reason for cherishing it. It is good—good for us, and especially for our children—to be reminded year after year that Israel can count among its great ones

88 THE CRUSE THAT FAILED NOT

men who displayed their devotion to their country and their God, sword in hand, and in front of a powerful foe. The martial deeds of the Maccabees are a welcome supplement to the life-long endurance of insult and cruelty, which plays so large a part in the mediæval story of our people. But the Feast of Chanukah not only makes these thrilling episodes live again, but forcibly brings home to us the dire peril with which the religion we love was menaced when the Maccabæan heroes were providentially raised up to be its salvation. We cannot but reverence the memory of men who preserved for us that treasure from which, if we are sincere Jews at all, we must own that we draw our sweetest comfort and our truest joy. And, therefore, we cannot but honour this Dedication Feast, which recalls the time when such signal services were performed for Judaism—nay, for us. We cannot but pray that this inspiring celebration may share the happy fate of the cruse of oil in the Biblical story and of the festive lights themselves, and, going from strength to strength, become an ever greater religious power among us as days roll on.

And so our thoughts are led from the distant past to the days that are to be. There are few of us, I think, who do not sometimes look forward and ask themselves what is to

be the future of Judaism. It is not an easy question to answer, and the reply will vary with the religious temper of him who asks it. Some will prefer to find the future mirrored in the present, and dream of the coming Judaism as but a copy of the Judaism that is. If a religion is to survive, they think, it must remain unaltered. Others take the directly opposite view. They cite the analogy of the physical world and the history of religion, both of which proclaim change to be the essential condition of all life, and then they picture to themselves a Judaism which shall find the source of its future strength in the fact that it is in unison with the new ideas that are slowly extending their sway over men's minds and lives. To whichever view we individually incline, we may at least be sure of this, that there is a future before Judaism. This is the assurance which is whispered by our legend and by our festive lamps to conservative and progressist alike. Judaism has safely emerged from its time of trial, from the cruel ordeal of persecution which seemed destined to destroy the feeble remnant of its life. The sacred flame, once so near to extinction, burns more brightly, more vigorously, than ever. Despite conflicting opinions about the nature and the destiny of their religion, which prevail among

90 THE CRUSE THAT FAILED NOT

the Jews themselves, it is firmly established in these latter days. Never, perhaps, has it numbered so many adherents, or taken a more commanding position among the religions of the world. Nay, Israel 'is seeing' at last 'of the travail of his soul,' and the truths he has suffered so terribly to defend are finding acceptance among the representatives of the very men who forced that grim defence upon him. Christendom is engaged at this moment in celebrating the birth of its religion—that religion which denies the unity of God, the central idea of Judaism. What agony has the Church not heaped upon the Jew because he refused to be false to this one cherished principle! And now see what a glorious revenge has been given to him. By slow steps this truth—this contemned, derided, persecuted truth—is making its way into Christianity itself, and as the mists of myth that cling about religion slowly disperse, the idea of the oneness of God shines out more brightly upon the minds of men. And so Israel is vindicated, and the truth for which he has suffered is receiving homage from the hands that persecuted him for it. It is, I say, a glorious revenge.

With confidence, then, may we look forward to the future. A religion that has survived deadly peril—a religion that is converting its

THE CRUSE THAT FAILED NOT 91

persecutors, conquering its conquerors—is destined to live, not to die. It may have to undergo further development in the coming days, but it will not perish. It has still work to do—still a light to kindle in the world—and for that it will be preserved. ‘The cruse of oil shall not fail until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth’—until the bountiful rain of the knowledge of God shall fertilise the human heart, and the religion of Israel be mirrored in the religion of all mankind.

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